

## The Summer that Could Be

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Saturday, March 26 2011 4:00 AM - Last Updated Saturday, March 26 2011 6:46 AM

---



I can see Cleveland falling for these Indians.

This is a city that could so badly use a champion, so badly deserves a champion, but absolutely needs a winning team.

This long, cold winter of discontent that started with LeBron James pissing all over Cleveland's wobbly self-esteem in his ballyhooed return and ended with a bitter NFL work stoppage has only served to further underline how emotionally crippled our fair city has become.

Even now, with the days growing longer and brighter and thermometers rising, our hope is far from eternal. With the Browns on hold and the Cavaliers in a rebuilding situation that has yet to actually begin, the door is left wide open for the Indians.

Putting it another way, smoking hot Marcia is out of town and cute little Cindy isn't old enough. Suddenly, Jan Brady doesn't look too bad.

The Indians have an opportunity to make their presence felt in a fashion not possible since the Browns left in 1996. They can be the toast of Cleveland once again, can become the talk of the town as they once were – not just in the late '90s, but back in the glory days of the 1940s and 1950s. They can become the first Cleveland team to exceed expectations in almost five years.

## The Summer that Could Be

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Saturday, March 26 2011 4:00 AM - Last Updated Saturday, March 26 2011 6:46 AM

---

This summer, the Indians have a chance to own Cleveland. And Cleveland is priced to move.

Call me crazy, call me wildly romanticizing the impending return of spring, call me high on decongestant, but I can see it.

I can see it just over the horizon, like the glimmering Emerald City at the end of the Yellow Brick Road.

I can see the Indians' summer that could be. Golden and long, filled with warm, happy days at Progressive Field and spine-tingling, sweaty-palmed nights with millions of eyeballs glued to SportsTime Ohio.

I can see these Indians making us proud. I see the criticisms of the Dolans and Mark Shapiro quieting, if not silencing, at least for the duration of the summer. I can see Indians fans forgetting that this team is still a year or two away from contending for the playoffs. I can see lightning caught in a bottle and everyone leaning closer to see what it looks like.

I can see the success of the Columbus Clippers over the past two seasons begin to be reflected along Lake Erie. I can see young players not yet ready for primetime still finding little ways to contribute and help the team win.

I can see sacrifice bunts and suicide squeezes. I can see low-scoring, one-run wins. I can see the Indians becoming a team other teams don't want to play.

I can see it starting with pitching, with Fausto Carmona leading a quietly efficient starting rotation, and Chris Perez anchoring a bullpen that other teams wish they had.

I can see professionalism and consistency spilling over to the lineup as key guys assume their roles. I can see Shin-Soo Choo once again as the heart and Asdrubal Cabrera as the catalyst. I can see Michael Brantley developing into a bona fide leadoff hitter. I can see Matt LaPorta

## The Summer that Could Be

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Saturday, March 26 2011 4:00 AM - Last Updated Saturday, March 26 2011 6:46 AM

---

regularly begin to hit for power. I can see the Sabathia, Lee, and Martinez trades starting to win games instead of lose them.

I can see Orlando Cabrera finding a niche, providing much-needed veteran leadership. I can see Grady Sizemore begin to once again look like Grady Sizemore and Travis Hafner once again contributing. I can see Carlos Santana begin to emerge as one of the American League's top young stars.

But let's be clear – I don't see a miracle. I don't see 100 wins or a 20-game winner or anybody ringing up 40 homers and 120 RBI. I don't see any individual wildly exceeding his expectations and carrying this team further than it has any right to go.

But I also don't see 90 losses. I don't see a team out of contention by Memorial Day. And I don't see a team that will disappoint us, no matter how low our expectations may be.

I can see a better start than we're used to – .500 by the end of April, a couple games above by the end of May. I can see things start to heat up with the weather, starting with a key home series with Minnesota in early June. By the time the Twins leave Cleveland, I can see the Indians officially declaring themselves a part of the race in the AL Central – and that they will no longer be bullied by their friends from the Twin Cities.

I can see the Tribe standing up to the Tigers and White Sox. I can see them mopping the floor with the Royals. I can see them playing well against the National League, even winning the six-game series with in-state rival Cincinnati. I can see them making a statement against the defending world champions at the end of June in San Francisco.

I can see the Yankees coming to town for the Fourth of July as a patriotic call to arms for the city of Cleveland, giving the Indians a chance to stand up to everything that stands against them and their blue-collar city – an epic battle of all that is good in America against all its pompous greed and excess. Followed by fireworks.

But I don't see this team playing particularly well against the Yankees or Red Sox. I don't see it

## The Summer that Could Be

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Saturday, March 26 2011 4:00 AM - Last Updated Saturday, March 26 2011 6:46 AM

---

handling long road trips well. I don't see it being able to avoid four- or five-game stretches where it has trouble scoring runs.

But I can see wins.

I don't see this team being swept often, and for each time it loses a series, I can see it winning another. I can see this team focusing primarily on the Central Division the way college basketball teams focus on their conference schedules. And I can see the Indians' modest payroll not mattering one bit in the divisional race.

I can see beleaguered, obsessive Cleveland fans remembering that you don't have to be better than the Yankees to make the playoffs. And I can see them remembering that once you're in the playoffs, anything can happen.

I can see the middle of August as high noon. I can see an Indians team just over .500, within five games of first place in a tight divisional race, entering a stretch of 12 straight games against the other three contenders – six at home, six away. I can see this as the Indians' chance to show they're ready to take the next step – not in 2012, but in 2011.

I can see the home game with Detroit on Labor Day afternoon as a defining moment of the season. I can see a big crowd at Progressive Field, one that believes its Indians are capable of something special. I can see Cleveland's youngsters climbing onto school buses on warm September mornings glowing from a Tribe win the night before that keeps it in the race.

I can see the last 12 games of the year – each against a divisional opponent – meaning something. And I can see this season – regardless of how it ends – meaning more.

I can see a city that simply has to have a winner – and a baseball team that won't let it down.